



Airborne Use of Force

Arming Coast Guard aviation.

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“Securing the American Homeland is a challenge of monumental scale and complexity. But the U.S. government has no more important mission.**”**

- President George W. Bush, in the National Strategy for Homeland Security

“The Coast Guard will adjust to that change and be ready to do what is necessary to ensure that maritime homeland safety and security are guaranteed.**”**

- ADM Thomas Collins, Commandant of the U. S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard transferred from the Department of Transportation into the newly created Department of Homeland Security in March 2003. For a service that traditionally considered search and res-

cue as one of its primary missions, this move was more than the physical shifting of departments. It required a shift of many age-old paradigms about Coast Guard missions, as well as the way the service conducts its day-to-day business.

Maritime Strategy for Homeland Security

To prepare for this move, the Coast Guard released the Maritime Strategy for Homeland Security in December 2002. In this document, the Coast Guard provided its maritime homeland security (MHS) mission statement:

“Protect the U.S. Maritime Domain and the U.S. Marine Transportation System and deny their use and exploitation by terrorists as a means for attacks on U.S. territory, population, and critical infrastructure. Prepare for and, in the event of attack, conduct emergency response operations. When directed, as the supported or supporting commander, conduct military homeland defense operations.”

In support of this mission, the service’s strategic objectives in maritime homeland security are:

- Prevent terrorist attacks within, and terrorist exploitation of, the U.S. Maritime Domain.
- Reduce U.S. vulnerability to terrorism within the U.S. Maritime Domain.
- Protect U.S. population centers, critical infrastructure, maritime borders, ports, coastal approaches, and the boundaries and seams among them.
- Protect the U.S. Marine Transportation System while preserving the freedom of the U.S. Maritime Domain for legitimate pursuits.
- Minimize the damage and recover from



Figure 1: A Coast Guard gunner sights in on a target from a Coast Guard helicopter.

attacks that may occur within the U.S. Maritime Domain as either the lead federal agency or a supporting agency.

Airborne Use of Force

With the creation of the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) in 1999, the main focus of the Coast Guard's Airborne Use of Force (AUF) from helicopters was on counter drug operations. After September 11, 2001, a Coast Guard workgroup was formed to research expanding AUF capability for application in maritime homeland security missions. This workgroup was comprised of key personnel from across the service; the group explored multiple AUF concepts and evaluated the rotary-wing fleet size needed to execute new mission sets.

As a follow-on, Aviation Training Center Mobile, Ala., established itself as the Coast Guard's AUF Center of Excellence. Within this command, the Aviation

Special Missions Branch was created to provide training and standardization support to AUF initiatives, including:

- aerial tactics;
- vertical insertion (fast roping);
- rotary wing air intercept;
- joint surface/air tactics;
- CBRNE (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear explosive) operations; and
- aerial gunnery.

Arming Coast Guard helicopters is critical to meeting the Department of Homeland Security's missions (Figure 1). Coast Guard armed helicopters have been used to meet maritime security requirements, including interdicting drugs, performing maritime security patrols, and protecting the public in U.S. ports and waterways during national special security events. These events have included the Group of Eight (G8)



Figure 2: A Coast Guard aviation gunner provides aerial security during a boarding exercise.

summit in Georgia, the national political party conventions in Boston and New York City, and President Reagan's funeral in California. Armed helicopters operating from the decks of Coast Guard cutters have interdicted record amounts of illegal drugs in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific. Eight Agusta Bell MH-68s provide the majority of this capability, basing from HITRON in Jacksonville, Fla. However, due to this small number of armed helicopters, many airborne homeland security missions are currently being conducted by unarmed aircraft.

The Coast Guard intends to equip all of its HH-65C and HH-60J helicopters—a total of 137 aircraft—with the ability to be armed, providing weapons as funding permits. This will give the Coast Guard the ability to respond quickly to emerging security threats wherever it operates. These armed helicopters will also continue to conduct all Coast Guard missions they currently perform (Figure 2).

Capability

Coast Guard aviation continues to adapt to the maritime homeland security mission. All air stations and aircraft type are supporting this mission with patrols offshore, in the ports and waterways across the nation. In addition, tremendous efforts are being made to determine how to provide a more robust aviation capability in the new department. One such program is the armed helicopter proof of concept.

In fall 2003 and spring 2004, the Coast Guard began an HH-60J airborne use of force proof of concept at Air Station Cape Cod, Mass. The primary purpose of the proof of concept was to measure operational effectiveness, compared with the impact of fielding a maritime homeland security AUF capability at an established Coast Guard air station, in terms of manpower, training, and other resource costs. Based on feedback and lessons learned during this project, the Coast Guard intends to use the model developed in Cape Cod to spread AUF capability within its helicopter fleet.

In 2005, the Coast Guard modified all of the HH-60J Jayhawk helicopters at Air Station San Diego for the AUF mission. This aircraft equipment includes:

- mounted M240 area fire weapons;
- shoulder-mounted backup M14 weapons;

- aircraft hardening (armor);
- pilot head-up display (HUD);
- upgraded forward-looking infrared/electro-optical (FLIR/EO) equipment;
- an upgraded radio to allow for better communications with local agencies; and
- body armor for aircrews.

Beginning this year, a core group of pilots and gunners at San Diego will be trained in day and night tactics and aerial gunnery.

Key to AUF capability is interoperability with the Coast Guard's tactical, maritime homeland security, and traditional law enforcement forces. Through research and the AUF proof of concept, the preliminary estimated costs of developing this capability have been learned. With time, the cost of various types of AUF capabilities and the scalability will be more accurately determined.

In July 2005, the Coast Guard established the Office of Homeland Security Operations & Tactics, with responsibility for tactical policy and requirements. This new office will combine the efforts of the diverse aspects of the Coast Guard's MHS package. Research, testing, and tactics development are well underway in the arenas of aircrew chemical, biological, and radiological equipment; rotary wing air intercept; and airborne designated marksman capability.

While striving to serve the American public in the maritime homeland security mission, Coast Guard aviation continues to examine and expand its capabilities to meet the service's strategic objectives.

***About the authors:** LCDR Melissa Rivera is a 1991 graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and an HH-60J Instructor Pilot/Flight Examiner with more than 10 years of flight experience. Currently, she is a Coast Guard Airborne Use of Force/Aviation Special Missions Program Manager. LCDR Rivera is a recipient of aviation awards from the Fraternal Order of Daedalians, Association for Naval Aviation, Naval Helicopter Association and a heroism award from the Coast Guard Foundation.*

CDR Aaron C. Davenport is a 1984 graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and a 1995 graduate of the University of California at Los Angeles. He has served in Coast Guard boat force, afloat, and marine safety operational commands, and his staff assignments include Combatant Command Headquarters and Logistics Command Atlantic. CDR Davenport's most recent assignment was command of Coast Guard Cutter Valiant. He has been selected for promotion to Captain and for the 2006 RAND Corporation Military Executive Fellowship.